

Message

From: EPA News [noreply@cision.com]
Sent: 10/25/2021 12:31:51 PM
To: Harris, Michael [harris.michael@epa.gov]
Subject: EPA Chicago - Daily Media Report - Monday, October 25, 2021

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Report Overview:



Total Clips (5)

Air - Quality (2)

Water - Drinking (2)

Water - Surface (1)

Headline	Date	Outlet	Outlet State	
Air - Quality (2)				
 Chicago metal scrapper sued for alleged emissions violations	10/24/2021	Associated Press Online	NY	 
 Chicago metal scrapper sued for alleged emissions violations	10/24/2021	GMToday.com	WI	 
Water - Drinking (2)				
 State official: Benton Harbor water crisis 'inexcusable'; Panel queries environmental chief, mayor on responses to lead issue	10/22/2021	Detroit News, The	MI	
 Benton Harbor water crisis takes center stage in Lansing	10/22/2021	Herald-Palladium, The	MI	
Water - Surface (1)				
 Changes to Minnesota's clean water rules get feds' approval	10/23/2021	Winona Daily News	MN	

News Headline: Chicago metal scrapper sued for alleged emissions violations |  


News Date: 10/24/2021

Outlet Full Name: Associated Press Online

Outlet State: NY

News Text: ... Despite that, the company said it had agreed to work with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency "to favorably address..."

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News Headline: Chicago metal scrapper sued for alleged emissions violations | 


News Date: 10/24/2021

Outlet Full Name: GMToday.com

Outlet State: WI

News Text: ... Despite that, the company said it had agreed to work with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency "to favorably address..."

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News Headline: State official: Benton Harbor water crisis 'inexcusable'; Panel queries environmental chief, mayor on responses to lead issue | 

News Date: 10/22/2021

Outlet Full Name: Detroit News, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: Lansing - Michigan's environmental director dodged a lawmaker's question about the safety of Benton Harbor's drinking water four times Thursday before finally saying it was unsafe.

Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy Director Liesl Clark initially just responded the state was providing bottled water to the community.

"Let's just talk like normal people here, it's a normal question: Is the water in Benton Harbor safe to drink or not?" Rep. Steve Johnson, R-Wayland, said during a Thursday House Oversight Committee hearing.

"No, it's not. People should be drinking bottled water," Clark said.

The exchange came as the department director described myriad factors that have ratcheted up attention on the Benton Harbor water crisis: Drinking water samples exceeded action levels for the sixth time in three years at the end of June; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency raised concerns that filters distributed to homeowners might not be working; and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's administration earlier this month asked residents to use bottled water and expedited replacement of lead service lines in the city.

Critics of the state's response have argued the real reason the state stepped up its response was because of residents' Sept. 9 petition asking the EPA to intervene in the city's case.

Thursday's hearing was tinged with political undertones that have persisted through what is now two lead-related water crises in Michigan: The role of emergency management in Black majority, low-income communities; a dearth of money to fix aging infrastructure; and missed opportunities to act sooner and more aggressively.

The combination of the EPA's study into the effectiveness of the water filters; the involvement of the Department of Health and Human Services, which usually opines on drinking water safety; and sporadic lead test results from some homes made it difficult to answer the question regarding the safety of the city's water, Clark said. The situation is "urgent and inexcusable," she said, but she emphasized the only long-term solution to the problem is to remove the lead service lines.

"We must recognize that our shared goal of safe drinking water for all Benton Harbor residents will not be achieved until we get all the lead pipes out of the ground," Clark said.

Elevated lead levels were first detected in Benton Harbor in 2018 during routine testing. Much of the city's water distribution system is about 100 years old. State and city officials treated Benton Harbor's drinking water with a corrosion chemical blend that failed to control harmful levels of lead for more than two years and rejected federal

requirements to fully study its effectiveness, The Detroit News reported last week.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services on Oct. 6 expanded the availability of bottled water in Benton Harbor "out of an abundance of caution," and encouraged residents to use it for cooking, drinking, rinsing foods and brushing teeth. On Oct. 14, Whitmer signed an executive directive implementing an "all-hands-on-deck" approach to replace 100% of the lead service lines in the city within 18 months.

Thursday's oversight hearing comes a few days after the chairman for the Senate Oversight Committee asked Whitmer's administration to provide communications between Jan. 1, 2019 and Oct. 15, 2021 related to its handling of elevated lead levels in Benton Harbor's drinking water. Sen. Ed McBroom gave the department 10 days to produce the documents.

Benton Harbor officials on Thursday defended the Democratic governor - who has been criticized for allowing the city to exceed lead action levels for nearly three years. They instead argued it was the GOP-led Legislature that failed to properly fund repairs and it was state emergency managers between 2010 and 2017 who cut spending to balance the budget.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad said the city needs another \$11.4 million to supplement the \$18.6 million it has already secured to replace its lead service lines. With the money in place, the city hopes to meet the governor's 18-month timeline for replacing the lead service lines.

"We can declare a state of emergency, but without the money and resources, nothing can be done," Muhammad said. "... If you know this is an urgent 911, then cut the check."

Muhammad told reporters after the hearing that he had not heard from Benton Harbor's state lawmakers - Sen. Kim LaSata, R-Bainbridge Township, and Rep. Pauline Wendzel, R-Watervliet - on the water issue since 2018.

Wendzel and LaSata both noted they had been part of the legislative majority that included about \$10 million in the most recent budget specifically for Benton Harbor.

In a Thursday statement, Wendzel said she has always and will always "fight for my community," but added that "the administration and city officials will have a lot of questions to answer about how this situation developed in the first place."

"Today's House Oversight Committee answered some questions, but it raised others - such as why the governor's administration did not request Benton Harbor-specific funding to address this situation in the previous two fiscal years," Wendzel said.

LaSata said Thursday she would be joining efforts to hand out water in Benton Harbor and said her top priority is "making sure everyone in Benton Harbor has access to safe drinking water."

"Lead line replacement is something I have been working on both in the district and in Lansing," she said in a statement. "It impacts so many communities, and it's important that we give it our due diligence and get these repairs done correctly."

Johnson questioned both Clark and Muhammad about why the issues in Benton Harbor were not brought to the attention of the Legislature earlier, noting that neither the city nor the state asked for specific appropriations for Benton Harbor drinking water in 2019 or 2020. Clark argued the agency had asked for half a billion dollars for a general clean water program.

"We weren't aware of this three years ago," Johnson said. "That's the problem. This was never elevated to us. ... I'm glad we're having this conversation now. I wish we would have had it two or three years ago."

Upon questioning from Johnson about whether he drank bottled water while Benton Harbor residents were left with conflicting advice about its safety, Muhammad said his home was one of those tested for lead and none was detected. Still, he said he has avoided using his own tap water over the past three years.

"I still use it for brushing teeth, for cooking; however, I've always drank bottled water because I don't like the chlorine, fluoride and other chemicals," Muhammad said.

After the hearing, Muhammad criticized the emergency management system the city was under from 2010 to 2017, arguing the emergency managers "came to put a tombstone" on the city. The emergency manager attempted to sell


the water plant and, when that fell through, "abandoned it" and laid off half the staff, he said.

"There was no mention of infrastructure; there was no mention of lead," Muhammed said. "There was simply bean countin' and trying to balance the budget. "

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Water main break spurs more use of bottled water in city. 9A

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News Headline: Benton Harbor water crisis takes center stage in Lansing | 

News Date: 10/22/2021

Outlet Full Name: Herald-Palladium, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: LANSING — The national spotlight was on Benton Harbor on Thursday as the state's House Oversight Committee in Lansing tried to figure out why the city's water crisis wasn't highlighted as a priority sooner.

Three years ago, some of the city's drinking water was found to have higher-than-acceptable amounts of lead in it, with state-mandated testing every six months showing that those levels remained high.

State Rep. Steven Johnson, chair of the committee, wanted to know what changed in the past 30 days to turn the situation into a crisis.

"It feels like we're going from zero to 100 miles per hour here," he said.

The state's short-term response has been to distribute free water filters certified to remove lead to residents through the Berrien County Health Department. The long-term solution of replacing lead service lines was expected to take 20 years due to its high cost.

But the ability of the water filters to remove the lead was recently called into question, said Eric Oswald, drinking water division director at the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE).

Liesl Clark, director of EGLE, said test results on how well the filters are working on the city's water should be back in a few weeks from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"We hope this study will result in restored community confidence in water filters, which are an important component in our long-term safe drinking water strategy," she said.

Until the test results are back, the state is urging residents to not drink the water.

The conversation eventually veered toward the quality of Benton Harbor's water, in which Clark admitted city residents should consider the water to be unsafe to drink.

Clark had dodged the question four times before being asked point blank by Johnson: "Let's just talk like normal people. It's a normal question. Is the water in Benton Harbor safe to drink or not?"

"No, it's not," Clark said. "People should be drinking bottled water."

Last week, Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II came to Benton Harbor to announce that Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive directive with the goal to replace all of the city's lead service lines in 18 months.

On Thursday, Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad told the committee that the city has received \$18.6 million in state and federal money and has started replacing lead service lines — but more is needed.

He said the city needs another \$11.4 million to get the job done in 18 months.

"I know it's a Mount Everest undertaking, however, I think that if we work together, we might be surprised," he said.

Muhammad said the only way for the problem to be solved is with money.

Location of the problem

Clark said the water leaving the city's water treatment plant has no lead in it.

"High lead level tests in Benton Harbor homes result from the water picking up the lead on its way as it moves to the faucets through the service lines and other plumbing that contains lead," he said. "This basic truth is the same for every or nearly every home in Michigan with elevated lead drinking levels."

The lead service lines from the property line into the home has historically been the responsibility of the homeowner. But recent state law is now requiring municipalities to replace 5 percent of the lead service lines at no cost to the homeowners.

Clark said there are Michigan communities throughout the state that have a problem with lead service lines, with Hamtramck residents being notified earlier this week that their drinking water was found to have high lead levels in it.

She said it would cost \$2 billion to remove all of the lead service lines in the state. Clark added that total doesn't include the cost to replace the lead fixtures and pipes inside a home.

"We've all been working on these water infrastructure issues, cataloging it, we're working through asset management plans whenever possible with communities to help them prioritize where they're spending their dollars," she said.

Another way municipalities are trying to stop lead from leaching into the home's drinking water until the pipes can be replaced is by adding corrosion control to the water.

Oswald said that in March 2019, the city started doing this, but it could take up to two years before the pipes are coated adequately.

"We are starting to see some good improvements in this last monitoring period," he said. "We're hopeful that that corrosion control chemical is taking effect."

Even this is only a short-term solution, Oswald said, because the coating can easily be knocked off if the pipe is jarred by, for example, construction.


"It only takes one mistake to strip that coating away," he said.

Johnson said at the end of the meeting that the committee will make recommendations sometime in the future.

Thursday's hearing was held after the state Senate Oversight Committee announced Monday it was requesting a list of documents from the state over its response to the elevated lead levels in Benton Harbor's drinking water.

Committee Chair Ed McBroom, R-Vulcan, sought correspondence among EGLE officials on the use of corrosion controls in Benton Harbor's water, on testing of the city's water and on the lead levels.

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News Headline: Changes to Minnesota's clean water rules get feds' approval | 

News Date: 10/23/2021

Outlet Full Name: Winona Daily News

Outlet State: MN

News Text: BRAINERD, Minn. — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has given a green light to changes to Minnesota's water quality rules that advocates say will weaken protections for the state's lakes and rivers.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency proposed amending the Class 3 and Class 4 water quality standards, which are intended to protect water for use by industry, agriculture, livestock and wildlife.

The MPCA said the old standards were based on outdated science, without a lot of supporting evidence behind the pollution limits. But water advocates worry that the amended rules could result in more salty pollutants ending up in Minnesota's lakes and rivers.

Melissa Lorentz, staff attorney with the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, one of the groups that opposed the changes, said they are "disappointed" with the EPA's approval and are considering options, including a possible appeal.

"We're concerned because this rulemaking actually removes standards that were in place to protect our waters from salt pollution," Lorentz said. "And that's pretty unusual under the Clean Water Act, to actually be removing standards that are in place."

Under the federal Clean Water Act, the state sets standards based on how the water from that lake, stream or river might be used, such as for drinking, for fishing and swimming, or to support aquatic life.

A water body can have more than one of these beneficial uses. Most Minnesota lakes and rivers are protected for aquatic life, industrial and agricultural use.

State regulators use the standards to determine how much of a particular pollutant a lake or river can handle when issuing permits to anyone who discharges a large amount of wastewater into that water body, such as industries, mines or sewage treatment plants.

The MPCA's changes, which were in the works for nearly a decade, eliminated some numeric limits on certain pollutants, including those affecting salinity, and replaced them with narrative statements that describe what the water quality should be.

When proposing the changes, state regulators said there wasn't a lot of supporting scientific evidence behind some of the existing numeric limits.

"What we were really trying to do was to build in some flexibility to look at Minnesota-specific conditions, and to make sure we had water quality standards that were really tailored to the conditions that we have in Minnesota," Catherine Neuschler, who manages the MPCA's water assessment work, said in March.

But water advocates argue that the narrative standards will be more difficult to enforce. They are especially concerned that the changes could lead to more chloride, bicarbonates and other salts being discharged into lakes and rivers, where they can harm aquatic life.

"There is research showing that our lakes are becoming saltier in Minnesota, and that the impacts of that pollution is really long term," Lorentz said. "So it's something that we need to put a stop to before it starts. It's not something that we can clean out of our water."

Several of Minnesota's tribal nations also opposed the changes, arguing that they would lead to degraded water quality in lakes and rivers that support fish and wild rice.

The EPA issued a letter on Oct. 8 approving the amended rules, saying it had determined that they met the requirements of the Clean Water Act and will protect aquatic life.

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